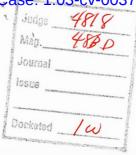
Case: 1:03-cv-00378-SSB-TSB Doc #: 1 Filed: 05/22/03 Page: 1 of 12 PAGEID #: 505



# IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO 03 M4Y 22 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO WESTERN DIVISION

**FERNANDO TATIS** Cote Des Neigs Montreal, Quebec Canada

Case No.

Judge

Magistrate

SHERMAN :

Plaintiff.

VS.

U.S. BANCORP, d/b/a US Bank. as successor to FIRSTAR BANK, N.A. 425 Walnut Street Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Defendant.

**COMPLAINT: JURY** DEMAND

**ENDORSED HEREON** 

The plaintiff, Fernando Tatis, through counsel and for his complaint against U.S. Bancorp as successor in interest to Firstar Bank, N.A., states the following:

#### Parties, Jurisdiction and Venue

- 1. At all material times the plaintiff Fernando Tatis ("Tatis") was and is a Maior League professional baseball player with the Montreal Expos. He maintains a residence in Montreal. Canada. as well as the Dominican Republic and is sui juris. He is not a native of the United States and English has never been his primary language.
- 2. At all material times Firstar Bank was a federally regulated and licensed financial institution and, upon information and belief, was organized and existed under the laws of the State of Ohio. Upon further information and belief, Firstar was acquired by or merged with U.S. Bancorp. d/b/a US Bank. U.S. Bancorp, d/b/a US Bank, is the successor in interest to Firstar for all liability and damages alleged herein. U.S. Bancorp, d/b/a US Bank, is a federally regulated and licensed financial institution organized and existing under the laws of the State of Minnesota. Firstar and U.S.

Bancorp d/b/a US Bank are hereafter referred to collectively as "Firstar" or "defendant."

- 3. Tatis was a customer of Firstar and maintained accounts at Firstar's offices located at 425 Walnut Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202, as more fully described below.
- 4. The amount in controversy, exclusive of attorneys' fees, costs, or prejudgment interest, exceeds the sum of \$75,000.00.
- 5. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to the diversity statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332.
- 6. Venue is properly laid before this Court in that the plaintiff's accounts with Firstar. and some or all of Firstar's conduct giving rise to this action, were located or occurred in Cincinnati.

  Ohio and within the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division.

### Facts Common to All Claims

- 7. Firstar operated and promoted a special Professional Sports Division within the bank catering to the particular needs of high-income, frequent traveler professional athletes. Firstar's Professional Sports Division offered programs to athletes including managed checking and money market accounts, other investment accounts, linked overdraft protection, and other financial services. Firstar solicited these services to many professional baseball, basketball, and football players, including Tatis.
- 8. Prior to April, 2001, Tatis opened several different accounts with Firstar's Professional Sports Division, including both checking and investment fund personal services accounts. some held individually and others held jointly with his wife.
- 9. As part of the special services provided by Firstar to Tatis, the Professional Sports

  Division handled any monthly checking account reconciliation for Tatis. To do this, Firstar sent the

monthly checking account statements generated by one department of the bank, not to the customer Tatis, but instead to Firstar's Professional Sports Division in care of its Cincinnati-based Division Manager, J. Jonathan Hayes ("Hayes").

- 10. Hayes regularly conducted banking business with, and on behalf of, many athletes and their sports agents as a special service offered by Firstar. Haves and his staff routinely received monthly bank statements on behalf of Firstar's Professional Sports Division account holders. including Tatis.
- 11. On or about April 4, 2001, Tatis opened as one of his several accounts with Firstar personal checking Account No. 792822785 ("the Tatis checking account"). The Tatis checking account was linked to other Tatis accounts to provide overdraft protection in the event of any checks being presented without sufficient funds in the account at the time of presentation. The Professional Sports Division held authority to make any transfers necessary from time to time for this overdraft protection purpose.
- 12. Firstar's Professional Sports Division and Hayes in Cincinnati were named as the addressee on the Tatis checking account for the mailing of the monthly statements. A true and correct copy of the account opening card for the Tatis checking account is attached as Exhibit A to this complaint.
- 13. Tatis was the sole party authorized to sign checks or withdrawals from the Tatis checking account. A true and accurate copy of Firstar's "authorized signature" card containing Tatis's signature and certifying that he was the sole authorized signer on the Tatis checking account is attached as Exhibit B to this complaint.
  - 14. Coincident with the opening of the Tatis checking account and as is customary in the

banking industry, Firstar provided Tatis with several "starter" checks for his general use until an order of checks preprinted with his name and address could be created by Firstar's check printing vendor and sent to Tatis at his Montreal residence.

- 15. Close in time to the opening of the Tatis checking account, Tatis began the 2001 Major League Baseball season with regular travel throughout the United States and Canadian cities where the Montreal Expos played, as well as to Latin America and those other places to which he and his family would travel from time to time.
- 16. Tatis wrote and signed the several starter checks as he traveled, which checks were duly negotiated, presented, and cleared by Firstar in the ordinary course of business.
- 17. Sometime thereafter, Firstar's check printing vendor mailed one or more boxes of preprinted checks for the Tatis checking account to the Tatis residence in Montreal.
- 18. Unbeknownst to Tatis, a maintenance worker/handyman acquaintance of Tatis's named Juan Carlos Ortiz Paredes ("Paredes") was present at Tatis's residence when the boxes of checks for the Firstar Tatis checking account arrived. Without Tatis's knowledge, permission, acquiescence, or authority, Paredes took one or more boxes of checks and over the next several months, from August, 2001 until November, 2001, proceeded to write numerous checks made payable to various parties, including merchants, to the order of cash, and to Paredes himself. Paredes forged Tatis's signature on all these checks, all without Tatis's knowledge, permission, acquiescence or authority.
- 19. Firstar received for payment and accepted as authentic each of these forged checks as payor bank, and paid them from funds in Tatis's checking and other accounts.
  - 20. At various times throughout the Fall of 2001, Firstar made transfers of various sums

of money from Tatis's investment or other accounts into the Tatis checking account to cover overdrafts resulting from Firstar's honoring and clearing of the checks forged by Paredes.

- 21. Paredes wrote these checks in escalating frequency without regard to whatever account balances existed in Tatis's account. Firstar paid these checks by transferring large lump sums of money from time to time from Tatis's other accounts to cover overdrafts in the Tatis checking account created by Firstar's honoring and payment of the forged checks. But for these transfers of funds by Firstar, the majority of these checks would have been returned unpaid for insufficient funds.
- 22. From September 2001 until the Paredes forgeries were discovered in December. 2001. Firstar honored these forged checks with other Tatis funds and also charged the Tatis checking account or other related Tatis family accounts overdraft and other charges, in amounts totaling. as near as presently can be determined, in excess of \$125,000.00.
- 23. Paredes has admitted his forgeries and that he committed them without the knowledge, authorization or complicity of Tatis.
- 24. Tatis at no time ratified the unauthorized signature of Paredes on any such checks, and received no benefit from them.
- 25. Tatis acted with reasonable dispatch in timely reporting these forged checks and the account discrepancies to Firstar when such unauthorized use of the Tatis checking account was uncovered in or about December, 2001.
- 26. Tatis has made demand upon Firstar to credit his accounts with all sums charged against them relating to the forged checks that Firstar honored and paid, including the amounts of all forged checks; all overdraft, NSF, transfer, or other charges: as well as reimbursement for interest on all these sums, all of which Firstar has refused or failed to do.

27. All conditions precedent to the filing of this action have been performed. excused. satisfied, or waived.

#### **Count One - Breach of Contract**

- 28. Tatis incorporates each of the foregoing allegations as if fully restated herein.
- 29. As payor bank, Firstar had a contractual obligation to verify the authenticity of Tatis's signature on any and all checks presented against the Tatis checking account, and to take all necessary actions not to honor or otherwise debit the Tatis checking account for any checks bearing an unauthorized signature.
- 30. Firstar breached such contractual duties by honoring or otherwise accepting and clearing for debiting against the Tatis checking account, each and all those checks upon which Paredes had forged Tatis's signature or otherwise contained an unauthorized signature.
- 31. As a direct and proximate result of Firstar's breach of contract, Tatis has been damaged in an amount to be determined at trial, but in excess of \$125.000.00.

#### Count Two - Negligence

- 32. Tatis incorporates each of the foregoing allegations as if fully restated herein.
- 33. As payor bank, Firstar owed a duty of care towards Tatis to verify the authenticity of Tatis's signature on any and all checks presented against the Tatis checking account. and to take all necessary actions not to honor or otherwise debit the Tatis checking account for any checks bearing an unauthorized signature.
- 34. Firstar breached such duty of care by honoring or otherwise accepting and clearing for debiting against the Tatis checking account, each and all those checks upon which Paredes had forged Tatis's signature or otherwise contained an unauthorized signature.

- 35. Firstar's breach of such duty of care owed towards Tatis constitutes negligence.
- 36. As a direct and proximate result of Firstar's negligence, Tatis has been damaged in an amount to be determined at trial, but in excess of \$125,000.00.

### **Count Three - Statutory Liability**

- 37. Tatis incorporates each of the foregoing allegations as if fully restated herein.
- 38. Pursuant to the Uniform Commercial Code as adopted in Ohio, and in particular pursuant to Ohio Revised Code §§ 1303.03.41(A), 1303.43, and 1304.30(A) and (B). Firstar is liable to Tatis for conversion and for wrongfully honoring any checks that did not bear his signature.
- 39. Tatis was not provided bank statements on a monthly basis as may have been routinely provided a typical checking account customer because of the manner in which Firstar's Professional Sports Division accounts were managed. Rather, the monthly statements were sent to rirstar's own agent and employee, Professional Sports Division Manager. Haves, for review and reconciliation. Accordingly, Tatis was not in a position, nor under any duty, to more timely discover or report the unauthorized signatures on the checks forged by Paredes.
- 40. As a direct and proximate result of Firstar's breach of its statutory duties owed towards Tatis, Tatis has been damaged in an amount to be determined at trial. but in excess of \$125,000.00.

#### Prayer for Relief

WHEREFORE, the plaintiff Fernando Tatis demands relief against the defendant U.S. Bancorp, d/b/a US Bank, as successor to Firstar Bank. N.A.. as follows:

1. An award of compensatory damages in an amount to be determined at trial, but in excess of \$125,000.00;

- 2. An award of prejudgment interest upon all amounts improperly paid out of or charged to Tatis's checking and other accounts; and
- 3. An award of costs and expenses of this action, including reasonable attornevs' fees. together with any and all other legal and equitable relief to which he may be entitled.

## **Jury Demand**

The plaintiff hereby demands a jury trial upon all issues herein.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth G. Hawley (0031772)

Trial Attorney for Plaintiff Fernando Tatis

1400 Fourth and Race Tower

105 West Fourth Street

Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Ph: (513) 721-1405 Fax: (513) 721-0519

OF COUNSEL:

Steven G. Schwartz, Esq. Schwartz & Horwitz 3301 N. W. Boca Raton Blvd., Suite 200 Boca Raton, Florida 33431

Ph: (561) 395-4747 Fax: (367) 1550

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EXHIBIT "B"

JS 44 (Rev. 3/99)

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CINCINNATI, OHIO 45202

Thu May 22 16:50:06 2003

The UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

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FILING FEE C-1-03-378

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Check No. 208 Amounts 150.00 Pay any Federal Reserve Bank or General Depository for credit to United States Treasury Symbol 4661